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SUBJECT: ILO/USDOL HIV/AIDS IN THE WORKPLACE PROJECT MOVING AHEAD IN  
TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

¶1. SUMMARY: ILO representatives were optimistic about progress as they completed the midterm assessment of the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) funded Trinidad and Tobago HIV/AIDS Workplace Education Program. After initial delays, new commitment and buy-in from the Ministry of Labor has resulted in advances in developing both a national HIV/AIDS workplace policy and HIV/AIDS policies and programs for individual enterprises. Given the importance of government support for this and other HIV/AIDS activities in T&T, Post is closely monitoring upcoming elections in the first week of November and any resulting changes in political and bureaucratic leadership that may influence further progress on HIV/AIDS issues.  
END SUMMARY.

¶2. Wael Issa, Technical Cooperation Officer for the ILO's "Programme for the Promotion of the Declaration," and Carol-Ann Senah, National Project Coordinator in the ILO's Port of Spain office, met with Post political and economic officers on October 19, while completing their mid-term assessment of the HIV/AIDS workplace education program that ILO is carrying out with US Department of labor funding, to report on progress to date, anticipated developments and potential areas for cooperation with the Embassy.

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Developing T&T's HIV/AIDS Workplace Policies  
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¶3. T&T is the 23rd country worldwide, and the fifth in the region, to implement the ILO/USDOL HIV/AIDS workplace education program. This three-year, US\$420,000 program addresses HIV/AIDS in the workplace in both the public and private sectors, and it complements GOTT efforts to implement T&T's first National HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan 2004-2008. While the T&T's National AIDS Coordinating Committee (NACC), established in March 2004, oversees implementation of the National HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan, ILO has the lead on workplace issues. The ILO/USDOL program was to start in 2005, but it was not until August 2006 that the ILO signed an MOU with the Ministry of Labor and Small and Micro Enterprise Development (MLSMED) to officially begin the program. According to Issa, a change in bureaucratic leadership in that ministry in 2006 brought new commitment and leadership to the issue, leading to the MOU signing and a start to programmatic activity.

¶4. While tripartite collaboration between the government, employers' organizations and trade unions is a project objective, the ILO strategy in T&T focuses on two distinct but complementary activities: first, developing a national workplace policy on HIV/AIDS to be implemented initially by government ministries, with the eventual goal of national HIV/AIDS legislation enforceable at all enterprises; and second, assisting individual private enterprises to develop and implement HIV/AIDS workplace policies and programs. Issa reported progress on developing the national workplace policy. After several rounds of comments, Issa expects

Cabinet to approve the policy by the end of November and for implementation to start in early 2008. [COMMENT: Elections are set for November 5, with new ministerial appointments expected even if the ruling party remains in power. MLSMED Minister Danny Montano has already announced publicly that he will not return to that portfolio. Gaining Cabinet approval for a national HIV/AIDS workplace policy within the first month of a new Cabinet would be an accomplishment and would indicate strong government commitment to the issue.]

15. Although the national workplace policy is not yet in place, the ILO is already working with the MLSMED to train staff and put programs in place for eventual implementation across the ministries.

The ILO is also working with twelve private enterprises across different sectors, including the energy, finance and tourism sectors, to develop their own HIV/AIDS workplace policies and programs. Despite occasional reluctance from management at the enterprises, Senah was encouraged by progress towards developing and implementing HIV/AIDS workplace policies at all but two of the enterprises. Issa reported that one company, National Petroleum, is already implementing its policy, while feedback from both management and the unions on Republic Bank activities has been very positive.

16. COMMENT: Support from top levels of government has been critical for the ILO/USDOL project and for other HIV/AIDS activity in T&T. While efforts are underway to develop NGO capacity for HIV/AIDS activities, including a CDC-sponsored series of workshops to enhance NGO capacity set for this fiscal year, HIV/AIDS activities and the boundaries of debate on the issue still stem primarily from the GOTT. With pending elections, it remains to be seen where HIV/AIDS falls on the list of government priorities and whether newly installed political and bureaucratic leadership will champion this issue, allowing for further progress. END COMMENT.

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